

# SPRING GARDEN CORRIDOR STUDY



2408 Spring Garden Street

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## **SPRING GARDEN STREET/OAKLAND AVENUE CORRIDOR**

### **1. PROCESS:**

On December 16, 17 and 18, 2003, the City of Greensboro and the LPNA sponsored an urban design charrette focused on the portion of the Lindley Park neighborhood between Spring Garden Street and Oakland Avenue. The three-person design team assembled to lead the charrette included an urban designer, a civil engineer and an architectural illustrator.

The charrette process included stakeholder meetings during the first two days to understand as many of the development issues as possible, community meetings each evening to review preliminary suggestions from the design team and a final presentation of concepts and visions on the last evening. Many of the industrial property owners and developers participated in one or more of the sessions, as well as numerous residents from the larger neighborhood.

The end result of the charrette was a series of vision drawings and perspective sketches showing possible future development options for the area. A charrette booklet has been produced with all of the plans and drawings created during this event. The urban design and development concepts created during the charrette were a starting point for the preparation of the strategies and recommendations contained in this neighborhood plan. The drawings themselves provide a suggested form for private development initiatives. The recommended regulatory changes and development guidelines to be fleshed out in future work tasks will provide the framework within which these concepts could be implemented.



## **2. CONTEXT:**

### **Historical Development**

Spring Garden Street is one of the original radial streets running from downtown to outlying communities. In the late 1800's J. Van Lindley took over a family nursery business called Pomona Nursery and proceeded to expand the operation, which eventually covered over 900 acres, including many acres of greenhouses and field stock on both sides of the railroad line. An arboretum was located along the southern side of Spring Garden Street.

In 1902 Lindley provided 26 acres to Greensboro Electric Co. for construction of an amusement park, which opened in 1902. The amusement park was served by an electric streetcar running from town along Spring Garden Street.

Shortly before his death in 1918, Lindley donated 40 acres adjacent to the amusement park to the City for a park and public playground. Lindley also made it clear that he wanted the best landscape architect available be selected to develop a plan for the area. In all over 62 acres was donated to the City, which commissioned Earle Sumner Draper to prepare a plan for the park and surrounding residential development. As stated earlier, the 1919 Draper Plan for Lindley Park provided for one the City's first truly planned communities, with a series of curvilinear streets that follow the topography of the land and highlighted by tree-lined streets and elegant entranceway columns at the primary park entrances.

The Draper Plan included only property on the northern side of Spring Garden Street, leaving the southern side to develop in a more random pattern. The historical presence of the railroad lines and its associated freight services fueled the development of industrial uses between Spring Garden Street and the railroad.

### **Development Patterns**

Because of the lack of an overall master plan for the development of the property between Spring Garden Street and Oakland Avenue, the area has developed in a rather haphazard pattern, with industrial and warehouse uses predominating along the southern boundary and residential uses dominating the Spring Garden Street frontage. Between the two areas is a mix of single family and duplex residential units and small scale industrial uses and vacant parcels.

The large block development pattern in the Spring Garden Street – Oakland Avenue zone remains a hinderance to efficient reuse of underutilized parcels. These blocks are too deep and long to support well-designed residential development.

While some attached housing units were built along Spring Garden Street in the 1960's and 70's, a more recent and significant impact is being felt by the neighborhood due to the trend toward development of higher density student housing complexes. Several such complexes have developed in the last 5 years along Spring Garden Street and one additional complex is proposed just west of Willowbrook Drive.

An analysis of potential for further development of attached housing units based on current zoning districts and property ownerships reveals that another 100 to 150 units could be built following current market trends. In addition to the potential for new units being built, there are a number of apartments along the Spring Garden Street corridor in need of significant rehabilitation and maintenance work. This presents an opportunity for either re-investment by the existing owners or purchase and investment by new owners.

### **3. PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPMENT:**

The community's vision for a revitalized Spring Garden Street corridor will be realized over time through a coordinated series of actions and development decisions made by property owners and developers working in concert with the Lindley Park Neighborhood Association and the City of Greensboro. To reach this vision, the following six goals are established to guide decision-making. Following each goal are specific strategies to be worked on:

#### **ISSUE 1: Enhance the walkability and pedestrian experience along Spring Garden Street.**

From its early days when the streetcar would clamor along, stopping where residents were sitting on front porches, Spring Garden Street is now a harsh, automobile dominated environment with parking lots and gaps in the building frontages creating unpleasant breaks in the streetscape. To enhance the pedestrian environment, attention to the location and design of fronting buildings must be addressed. Pedestrian destinations at easily walked intervals along the corridor will need to be reinforced. The continuity and condition of sidewalks, curbs, street trees and other pedestrian amenities will need study. Selective locations of medians, plazas, and other devices to slow down traffic, as well as a clear plan for on-street parking will all form a part of the traffic-calming plan for this corridor.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a. Prepare development guidelines concerning building setbacks, spacing, and design of building fronts;
- b. Repair and fill gaps in sidewalks and widen where necessary;
- c. Look for opportunities for street tree planting and additional park space along Spring Garden Street;
- d. Install medians in selected locations for calming traffic and increasing pedestrian safety;
- e. Prepare an on-street parking plan;
- f. Install other pedestrian enhancements, such as street lights, trash cans, bike lanes and covered bus stops; and,
- g. Consider re-creation of the "Lindley Park Arch" along Masonic Drive, possibly in conjunction with a bus stop.

**ISSUE 2: Provide identified opportunities for the development of enhanced neighborhood retail destinations.**

By analyzing the historical locations and spacing of shop locations, the plan for Spring Garden Street recommends re-enforcing historic patterns by locating business areas around one-quarter mile, or roughly a five-minute walk, apart along the corridor. The Plan provides specific locations and boundaries for these areas to ensure that a strong residential character is maintained along Spring Garden Street. Also recommended is the development of guidelines to assure that the form of new commercial development enhances the essential qualities of the Lindley Park neighborhood.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a. Locate four retail districts at 5-minute walk intervals along the corridor;
- b. Promote the existing ethnic diversity of businesses;
- c. Encourage mixed-use development with ground floor retail;
- d. Prepare development guidelines for retail areas, including setbacks (0-5 feet), wider sidewalks, and shared parking located behind buildings; and,
- e. Coordinate the on-street parking plan with retail needs.

**ISSUE 3: Identify areas to be retained for industrial uses and provide enhancements needed for the viability of these uses.**

Throughout the public planning process, residents and business interests spoke to the viability of industrial uses along Oakland Avenue and the need to provide for their specific needs. At the same time, the Plan needs to identify a clear boundary between the industrial uses and the rest of the neighborhood so that appropriate buffers can be provided to reduce conflicts between these uses. Access in and out of the industrial area has also been addressed through a recommendation to enhance the Oakland Avenue – Holden Road intersection.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a. Identify clearly defined boundaries for industrial zoning;
- b. Recommend the creation of buffer zones as adjoining properties develop; and,
- c. As an early action item, study the redesign of the Holden Road/Oakland Avenue intersection to provide better truck access into and out of the area.

**ISSUE 4: Provide for a diverse scale of residential development opportunities that retain and enhance the character of the corridor.**

The plan for residential development along the corridor is borne from the neighborhood vision statement that establishes Lindley Park “as a residential neighborhood set in a public park...and a broad mix of architectural styles”. Filling in between the commercial nodes, the plan recommends a mix of single family, attached housing and mixed-use developments. Traditional neighborhood development guidelines are recommended to ensure this development integrates well with the existing neighborhood.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a. Provide information and incentives to encourage renovation of existing homes;
- b. Undertake a housing market study of alternative housing types;
- c. Promote development of alternative housing styles, including townhouses and mixed-use developments;
- d. Encourage mixed-income development that reflects the existing residential character of the neighborhood core
- e. Prepare design guidelines for new development that will encourage the character of development desired by the neighborhood.

**ISSUE 5: Develop signature gateways at the east and west entrances to the neighborhood along Spring Garden Street.**

Recognizing that Spring Garden Street, in addition to serving as a local access street, also serves as a connector street carrying traffic through the neighborhood, the Plan provides suggested gateway entrance points at both ends. These gateways would serve as both a location for enhanced commercial and institutional development, and as visible statements that this street segment is a special place and drivers should expect to react differently to the changing streetscape features throughout this district.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a. Promote public/private partnerships with property owners and developers;
- b. Utilize building siting and massing to create strong focal points; and,
- c. Provide flexible development standards that promote mixed-use and higher intensity development at the gateway entrance points.

**ISSUE 6: Develop guidelines for developers, builders and residents to implement the vision.**

The Plan articulates a vision for the corridor. Private property owners and developers will, for the most part, be responsible for implementing that vision. To ensure that those private development decisions move the neighborhood closer to their desired vision, the Plan recommends a framework land use plan and study of an overlay district that would provide development guidelines for new development.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a. Utilize the framework land use plan to guide decision-making on future land use and zoning changes; and,
- b. Prepare a pedestrian-scale overlay district study and recommendation for properties fronting Spring Garden Street and other selected areas.

#### **4. ILLUSTRATIVE URBAN DESIGN PLAN:**

The Illustrative Urban Design Plan provides a vision for how the Spring Garden Street – Oakland Avenue corridor could develop over time. It is not meant to be a rigid prescription nor a specific development proposal. Rather, it articulates how the principles of quality traditional neighborhood planning and design could come together to create a high quality urban place that compliments and enhances the original 1919 Draper Plan that guided much of the remainder of Lindley Park’s development.

##### **Key Elements of the Illustrative Urban Design Plan**

- A.** East and west gateway areas;
- B.** Commercial development areas;
- C.** Future transit-oriented development site;
- D.** Industrial area buffers;
- E.** Possible median treatments;
- F.** New residential development areas; and,
- G.** Mixed use development area.

### **Retail Focus Areas**

Creating commercial areas that are quality destinations for residents of Lindley Park and draw from outside the neighborhood as well is critical to the stability of these areas. Common development principles recommended for all of these locations include:

- Buildings set back 0 to 5 feet from front property line;
- Sidewalks increased to 10 to 12 feet wide;
- Parking lots shared between uses and located behind buildings;
- On-street parking allowed along these frontages; and,
- Access drives for parking areas located off of side streets where possible.

Four locations are recommended for enhanced commercial development, as described below.

#### **Spring Garden at Holden Road**

At this major western gateway into the neighborhood, the plan creates a larger commercial development zone running eastward to McManus Street. Buildings could be 2 to 3 story and include retail on ground floor and office or residential above.

#### **Spring Garden at Park Terrace**

This smaller existing commercial center could grow slightly and could support more neighborhood scale commercial uses with rear parking.

#### **Spring Garden at Howard Street**

This existing commercial cluster should be enhanced, with a suggestion to look for ways to improve its pedestrian amenities. The existing buildings on the north side that sit well back from the street with parking in front do not fit the desired pattern of development and redevelopment of these sites to a character more in keeping with the building on the northeast corner would be desirable.

#### **New Commercial Center between Lindell Road and Howard Street**

A major new business district is suggested as one possibility for the property between these two streets south of Spring Garden Street. Current development on this site includes apartment houses and a mobile home park. If and when other development occurs on this site, the plan suggests that this area could become a significant new shopping and mixed use development zone that would unite the former Rolane Mill outlet building with the rest of the neighborhood. This development should not be allowed to be done piecemeal, but rather as a unified plan that would provide the design integrity and pedestrian amenities needed to enhance adjoining developments and the neighborhood as a whole.



### **Mixed Use Development Areas**

Several areas are suggested for consideration of mixed-use developments that might include retail, office or residential uses:

#### **Spring Garden at Scott Avenue**

This eastern gateway into the neighborhood is ideally located to support some higher intensity development. The historic Pomona school building on the southeast corner establishes an ideal design feature to emulate on the other corners of this intersection. University or other civic uses would be ideal at this location, and should enhance the current long-range plans that UNC- Greensboro has for this block. Again, parking should be behind buildings. A gateway plaza or public green is suggested at this location to begin the change in streetscape appearance for the corridor and to identify the transition into the neighborhood.

#### **Former Rolane Mill complex/Transit-Oriented Development Site**

The former Rolane Mill property provides a unique opportunity to undertake larger-scale mixed use development. The building itself should be preserved and renovated and the adjoining properties developed to enhance the overall block. Should the opportunity emerge to combine this development plan with the properties between Hiatt Street and Spring Garden Street to create a cohesive and unified development plan for the larger block.

The plan also suggests that the potential location of a future light-rail transit stop be a consideration in any development plans for the property. While this transit stop may be a long-range vision and many years in the making, this location has the unique location of being at the confluence of 2 major regional transit corridors and could act as a major transfer station. Other communities have utilized these types of locations for significant higher-intensity transit-oriented developments.

### **Residential Development Areas**

The plan recommends numerous locations where the renovation of existing homes or the development of new residential units can occur. The scale and pattern of residential development is encouraged to emulate the existing neighborhood north of Spring Garden Street. Key development principles include:

- All residential buildings have a front façade that is parallel to a public street
- Building setbacks are consistent along a block face
- Rear alleys and driveways are used for accessing parking and service areas which are behind buildings
- The architecture and detailing of new development upholds the character of the neighborhood
- Attached housing developments are permitted, as long as they reinforce the above principles

### **Priority Infrastructure Initiatives**

For Spring Garden Street to become a quality pedestrian-scaled urban environment, several key public infrastructure upgrades are recommended for further study.

#### **Sidewalks**

Gaps in the sidewalks along Spring Garden Street should be filled so that there are continuous sidewalks in good condition, running on both sides the entire length of the street.

#### **Street Tree Canopy**

A street tree planting program should be implemented to reforest the corridor – further study of the J. Van Lindley Nursery history may give clues that could be used as a focus for this effort.

#### **Street Median Treatments**

The plan recommends that the City study the possibility of installing a planted median in two locations along Spring Garden Street to slow traffic and enhance the attractiveness of the corridor. One section would be between Amesbury and Lindell Roads. The other would be between Northridge and Elam. Median treatments are not recommended in locations where commercial development is encouraged.

#### **Intersection Modifications at Holden Road and Oakland Avenue**

To provide better access for tractor trailers and other vehicles serving the industrial area, the plan suggests that the Holden/Oakland intersection be studied to identify a better design for large truck access into and out of the industrial zone. Improving this access point could lessen the need for large trucks to use Spring Garden Street and several of the internal connecting streets.